DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 834 CS 007 960

AUTHOR Harlin, Rebecca P.
TITLE Prereaders' Story Processing Strategies.
PUB DATE 19 Oct 84
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Florida Reading Association (22nd, Jacksonville, FL, October 18-21, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Development; *Cognitive Processes; Early Childhood Education; Early Reading; *Language Processing; Language Usage; Nursery Schools; *Parent Role; *Prereading Experience; Reading Instruction; Reading Research; Reading Strategies; Story Reading
IDENTIFIERS Print Awareness; Story Grammar; *Story Telling by Children

ABSTRACT

A study examined prereaders' story processing strategies by assessing their performance on tasks that tapped their ability to (1) use story grammar and role playing, (2) retell a wordless picture book, (3) read a predictable book, (4) retell an oral story, (5) sequence pictured story events, and (6) fingerpoint-read a nursery rhyme. Parent interview data were also used to indicate experiential background with stories. Results indicated that prereaders' story processing strategies varied according to age, task format, print awareness, and home reading experiences. While older subjects tended to perform better on some tasks such as syntactic recall, picture sequencing, and fingerpointing, there were no significant differences in tasks involving story elements and role taking, main idea, reasoning, predicting, projecting, linking with prior experiences, semantic recall, line sequencing, or word recognition. The findings also indicated that children with a well-developed sense of story employed more successful strategies on other tasks regardless of their pictorial or nonpictorial format. While the results of a print awareness task indicated that the ability to map speech to print was correlated with age, it was more strongly related to a composite of three story processing tasks: sequencing story events, using semantic information, and projecting story events. It was also apparent that particular aspects of the home reading experience had a more significant impact on the development of certain story strategies than others. These included the number of people available to read to the child, the rereading of favorite story books, and the discussion of story books after the child's assumption of the role of reader through sharing books with younger siblings/children. (FL)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.



ED254834

# Prereaders' Story Processing Strategies

Rebecca P. Harlin, Ph.D.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Reading

State University College

Geneseo, New York 14454

Florida State Reading Conference

Jacksonville, Florida

October 19, 1984

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Rebecca P. Harlin

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 007960

Running Head: STORY STRATEGIES

Abstract

This study evaluates prereaders' story processing strategies by assessing their performance on six tasks. The tasks tap the child's ability to utilize story grammar and role playing, retell a wordless picture book, read a predictable book, retell an oral story, sequence pictured story events, and fingerpoint-read a nursery rhyme. Parent interview data is also used to indicate experiential background with stories. Reliable data for four- and five-year-old prereaders are presented. Relationships between age, task format, and experiential story reading background are discussed. Results showed that prereaders vary in the strategies they employ and in their print awareness.

# Prereaders' Story Processing Strategies

## Introduction

Recent studies of prereaders have investigated various aspects of their literacy development including story schema, print awareness, and use of book language (Clay, 1979; Holdaway, 1979; Mason, 1980; Teale, 1981). Each study has added a significant piece to the literacy puzzle. The concepts of letter and word which develop as children mature are enhanced by repeated interactions and experiences with print (Huba & Kontos, 1982; Morris, 1981).

Additional understanding of the child's literacy development has been gained through investigation of the parents' storyreading styles. Upon examining the parent-child storyreading episode, it was found that two aspects, episode frequency and the amount of verbal interaction, are positively related to subsequent success on readiness tasks as well as to first grade reading achievement (Flood, 1978; Walker & Kuerbitz, 1979). Thus, the home reading environment may have a lasting impact on initial reading success.

Examinations of the child's concept of story have shed further light on the development of literacy. Preschoolers' ability to tell well-formed stories develops gradually over time (Applebee, 1978). Those preschoolers who have a well-developed sense of story perform better on tasks requiring the retention of story information (Gormley & Frank, 1983). However, the nature of the strategies preschoolers employ to recall and talk about stories has not been thoroughly investigated.

Purpose and Methodology

It was this lack of substantial information about prereaders' story strategies that lead to the design of this study. The development of story strategies across age levels and tasks, as well as the relationship of the child's home story reading experiences to task performance were examined. It was believed that the strategies demonstrated by task performance were those which underlie the child's story schema.

The sample consisted of thirty nursery school children ranging in age from 51 to 65 months and included an equal number of boys and girls. All subjects were non-readers. Most of the subjects came from middle income, two-parent families. Many had working mothers. Parents of the subjects were interviewed by telephone upon completion of the tasks.

Six tasks were used to evaluate the performance of the subjects on several variables. These particular tasks were selected due to their use in previous research and their stimulus variation in tapping prereaders' strategies in recalling, organizing, and discussing stories and interacting with print. (See Table I.) Each task was administered in sequence, to individual subjects. No more than two tasks were administered in any one day.

Data from individuals' responses to tasks were transcribed from tape recordings and coding sheets and tallied. Individual percentage scores were calculated for each task and subtask, and subjects ranked accordingly. Comparisons of rankings across tasks and with home story experiences were made using Spearman-rank correlations. Parent interview responses were also tallied, combined and ranked.

## Results

Upon examination of the data, it became evident that prereaders' story processing strategies vary according to age, task format, print awareness, and home reading experiences. While older subjects tended to perform better on some tasks such as syntactic recall, TASK 4A ($r_s$ = .51, t = 3.14, $\alpha$ = .005), picture sequencing, TASK 5 ($r_s$ = .44, t = 2.62, $\alpha$ = .01) and fingerpointing, TASK 6B ($r_s$ = .45, t = 2.64, $\alpha$ = .01), there were no significant differences in tasks involving story elements and role taking (TASK 1), main idea (TASK 2A), reasoning (TASK 2B), predicting (TASK 2C), projecting (TASK 2D), linking with prior experiences (TASK 2E), semantic recall (TASK 4B), line sequencing (TASK 6A), or word recognition (TASK 6C). Thus, the development of a variety of story strategies cannot be attributed to maturation alone.

Throughout the study, it became evident that children with a well-developed sense of story (TASK 1) employed more successful strategies on other tasks regardless of their pictorial or non-pictorial format. They outperformed their peers on the wordless picture book (TASK 2), the oral story without picture cues (TASK 4), and the pictured story events without text (TASK 5) ($r_s$ = .32, t = 1.81, $\alpha$ = .05). However, there was no difference in their performance compared to their peers on the predictable book, The Bus Ride (TASK 3). Although The Bus Ride has picture cues and a predictable text in terms of grammatical structures, it has no story. Thus, regardless of its similar stimulus, pictures, it fails to conform to the child's story schema thereby negating the application of any story strategies (Bridge, Winograd & Haley, 1983).

Previous literacy research has indicated that prereaders with a well-formed sense of story are more able to structure and retell a wordless picture book, utilizing the elements of story grammar, talking like a book, and providing dialogue for the characters (Gormley & Frank, 1983). Likewise, those subjects who brought well-formed story books for TASK 1, not caption books, were also likely to exhibit these same characteristics in their retelling of the familiar story and of the wordless picture book, The Lost Kitten (TASK 2). Their renditions of the familiar book were closer to the text and relied less on pictures than children with incomplete story schemata. This ability to utililize many story elements was found in older as well as younger subjects.

Studies of print awareness have indicated a developmental trend in children's ability to locate and map print (Clay, 1979; Harlin, 1983). While results of print awareness subtask 6B indicated that the ability to map speech to print was correlated with age ($r_s$ = .45, t = 2.64, $\alpha$ = .01), it was more strongly related to a composite of three story processing tasks: projecting into characters (2C), utilizing semantic information (4B), and sequencing story events (5) ($r_s$ = .44, t = 2.58, $\alpha$ = .01). However, the other print awareness subtasks, line recognition (6A) and sight word recognition (6C), were not. One explanation may be that the processes involved in sequencing story information may be similar to those used in sequencing (mapping) print (Jensen, 1984).

From parent interviews and review of task data, it is apparent that particular aspects of the home reading experience have a more significant effect on the development of certain story strategies than others. A four-part composite of the number of people available to read to the subject,

the rereading of favorite story books as requested by the subject, the post reading discussion of story books, and the subject's assumption of the role of the reader through sharing books with younger siblings/children was found to correlate significantly with the development of story grammar and role taking (TASK L) ($r_s$ = .68, t = 4.88, $\alpha$ = .0005). In addition this composite of home storyreading experiences was also related to a combination of projecting into character (TASK 2D), recalling semantic story information (TASK 4B), and sequencing story event pictures (TASK 5) ($r_s$ = .34, t = 1.91, $\alpha$ = .05). Neither finding is unusual when one considers the following research.

Implications for Parents and Teachers

The number of people in the home who are available and who read to children has significance in developing story strategies (Teale, 1978). This increased availability of readers not only provides many opportunities for sharing books, but also a range of story reading styles to imitate. By having a number of books reread, the child is able to internalize this varied language and structure (Holdaway, 1979). Thus the rereading may also contribute to the child's ability to internalize story grammar elements. Discussing books after they have been read helps answer questions, clarify information, discuss pictures, and link with previous experiences (Teale, 1981; Walker & Kuerbitz, 1979). Such discussion may explain the child's ability to recall semantic story information and to sequence pictured story events. Role playing the "reader" with younger siblings or friends gives the child the opportunity to practice reading-like behavior (Clay, 1979). This role may enable the child to orchestrate

and refine his ability to tell a well-formed story. Thus, much of the foundation for developing successful strategies is firmly established in the home.

For teachers of preschool and primary grade children, there are several implications. First, there is the need for assessment of children's story strategies to plan appropriate experiences. For children with well-developed story strategies, a language experience or shared books program would be appropriate. This would enable them to continue to refine and expand their strategies (Jensen, 1984). For children having little or no experience with stories or print, a rich variety of literary experiences and encounters with environmental print are warranted. Second, the emphasis on active involvement of the children is clear. Whether they are listening to a story or reading it together, they need to be actively engaged through discussion or an every-pupil-response mode like the shared book approach. Third, there is the need for repetition of lively, enjoyable literature. This not only enables children to become familiar with book language, but also with the elements of a well-formed story. Their ability to map speech either on a chart or a Big Book will also be refined through repetition of fingerpointing. Finally, there is the need for the teacher to be a reading role model, especially for those children whose parents do not read.

## References

Applebee, A. N. (1978). The child's concept of story. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Blank, M., & Frank, S. M. (1971). Story recall in kindergarten children: Effect of method of presentation on psycholinguistic performance. Child Development, 42, 299-312.

Bridge, C.A., Winograd, P. N., & Haley, D. (1983). Using predictable materials vs. pre-primers to teach beginning sight words. Reading Teacher, 36, 884-891.

Brown, A. L. (1976). Semantic integration in children's reconstruction of narrative sequences. Cognitive Psychology, 8, 247-262.

Clay, M. (1979). Reading: The patterning of complex behavior (2nd ed.). Exeter, NH: Heinemann.

Flood, J. (1977). Parental styles in reading episodes with young children. Reading Teacher, 31, 864-867.

Gillet, J. W., & Temple, C. (1982). Understanding reading problems: Assessment and Instruction. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Gormley, K. A., & Frank, M. (1983, November). Assessing prereader's sense of story. Paper presented at the annual conference of the New York State Reading Association, Kiamesha Lake, New York.

Harlin, R. P. (1983, April). Primary children's print awareness as a predictor of reading achievement. Paper presented at the annual conference of the New England Educational Research Organization, Rockport, Maine.

Holdaway, D. (1979). The foundations of literacy. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.

Huba, M. E., & Kontos, S. (1982, March). Assessing prereader's concept of written language. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY.

Jensen, M. A. (1984, February). Young children's story processing abilities and story knowledge. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Educational Research Association, West Palm Beach, FL.

Mason, J. M. (1980). When do children begin to read: An exploration of four-year-old children's letter and word reading competencies. Reading Research Quarterly, 15, 203-227.

Morris, D. (1981). Concept of word: A developmental phenomenon in the beginning reading and writing processes. Language Arts, 58, 659-668.

Teale, W. H. (1978). Positive environments for learning to read: What studies of early readers tell us. Language Arts, 55, 922-932.

Teale, W. H. (1981). Parents reading to their children: What we know and need to know. Language Arts, 58, 902-911.

Tough, J. (1976). Listening to children talking: A guide to appraisal of children's use of language. London: Schools Council Publications, Ward Lock Educational.

Walker, G. H., & Kuerbitz, I.E. (1979). Reading to preschoolers as an aid to successful beginning reading. Reading Improvement, 16, 149-154.

Table I

Story Task Analysis: Cues and Responses

| Description of Task | Use of Pictures | Use of Story Content Questions | Recall of Syntactic Structures | Recall of Story Events and Sequences | Recall of Character Script | Use of Print |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TASK 1 (Warm-Up)<br>Read or tell a favorite caption/story book (Clay, 1979)<br>-Allows child to discuss familiar book brought from home.<br>-Provides information on child's story grammar and role-taking ability. | X | | | X | (X) | X |
| TASK 2 The Lost Kitten<br>Discuss wordless picture book (Tough, 1976)<br>-Assesses ability to comprehend main idea, make predictions, reason, project into characters, and link story content to child's prior experience. | X | X | | | | |
| TASK 3 The Bus Ride<br>"Read" a predictable book (Bridge, Haley & Winograd, 1983)<br>-Assesses ability to recall syntactic patterns with the aid of maximal and minimal picture cues while "solo reading" the book. | X | | X | | | X |
| TASK 4 "The Bird and the Cat"<br>Recall an oral story (Blank & Frank, 1971)<br>-Assesses ability to use free and question-prompted recall of a story without the support of picture cues.<br>-Evaluates semantic and syntactic recall. | | X | X | | | |
| TASK 5<br>Sequence pictured story events (Brown, 1976)<br>-Assesses ability (following two pre-test training stories) to discriminate and sequence a series of four or five pictured story events or two test stories. | X | | | X | | |
| TASK 6 "Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater"<br>Voice-point a nursery rhyme (Gillet & Temple, 1982; Morris, 1981)<br>-Tapped ability to locate and map speech and print, sequence and locate lines of print, and recognize words in and out of context.<br>-Demonstrates that subjects were prereaders, not readers. | | | | | | X |